

**Walter George Earley**

**Isle of Wight County Press Saturday October 19th 1929**

**DEATH FROM BLOOD POISONING**

**SAD END OF COWES GASWORKS EMPLOYEE.**

Precisely how a gasworks stoker in the employ of the Cowes District Council, contracted blood poisoning which resulted in his death at the Royal I.W. County Hospital a few days after admission was not elucidated at the inquest held at the Primitive Methodist Schoolroom, Ryde, on Tuesday. The inquiry, which was conducted by the Deputy Coroner (F. A. Joyce, Esq.) concerned the death of Walter George Earley, aged 42, of 1 Brooklyn-cottages, Gunville, who leaves a wife and large family. - Mr. G. Bartley was chosen foreman of the jury, Mr. J. C. W. Damant represented the Cowes Council, and Mr. R. Hughes appeared on behalf of the relatives. Capt. M. K. Pedlar, HM. Inspector of Factories, and Police-Inspector A. Morrison were also present.

Elle. Jane Earley, the widow, said her husband was employed as a stoker at the gasworks of the Cowes District Council. On October 3rd he returned home from his work at 10.30 p.m. and complained of his arm, and saying that he felt leer. She asked him if he had done anything to his arm and he said he did not remember. She saw a swelling the shape of the bowl of a spoon on the back of his right arm just below the elbow, but the skin was not broken. On the following morning she sent for Dr. Foster and on his instructions she applied hot fomentations. The doctor told her he thought it was a touch of fluid. The next day when the doctor called the swelling become larger. The nurse went for the doctor on Sunday as the swelling had not come to a head, and the doctor suggested her husband should go to the County Hospital to have it lanced, and he was taken there the same day.

In reply to Capt. Pedlar witness said she saw a certificate given by the doctor that her husband was suffering from septic cellulitis.

The Coroner said he could not admit that statement, much as he would like to help the widow. In such cases there arose the question of compensation, and he was not calling the doctor as to the certificate.

Mr. Joyce asked witness if Dr. Foster expressed any opinion as to the illness her husband was suffering from before he went to hospital, and she replied not exactly.

The Coroner: Did he say anything about gas poisoning? - He said it might have gone through the pores.

By the inspector: There was no rash or bruise on the swelling.

Frank Henry Earley, of 7 Brooklyn-cottages, Gunville, a brother, said he had worked with deceased at the Cowes Gasworks for a good many years. On October

3rd, about 6 o'clock. deceased complained of his right arm, which he showed to witness. Witness saw something like a little bunch under the skin. Deceased kept complaining, and when they left off work at 10 o'clock deceased washed his arm and again showed witness. He then saw that the bunch had increased in size to nearly that of a small egg. At 10 o'clock the next day he called at his brother's house to see how he was and he showed him his arm again. He then saw that the swelling was above and below the elbow. His brother had not before complained of any injury, and he asked him if he had struck his arm, and he said he had not.

By Mr. Hughes: His brother told him he did not remember striking his arm. From the nature of their work as stokers it might be possible to rub parts of the body against anything and not notice it.

The Coroner: But the skin was unbroken.

By the Inspector: Deceased was always in good health.

Frederick Gladdis, a stoker at the Cowes Gasworks, living at 10 Temperance-terrace Cowes, said he saw deceased at 9.30 on October 3rd, when he showed him the swelling in his arm and asked " What's that? " Witness replied " You have knocked that, George," and he said " No, I've not." Witness said " You must have," and deceased answered " I have not." Witness then told him it was either a boil or an abscess.

By the Inspector: He had not come across any cases of inflammation of the skin arising from the work there or any case of dermatitis. He had worked at the East Cowes Gasworks as well as at Cowes, but had never known a case of that sort. When deceased showed him his arm the swelling was slightly inflamed and purple in colour, but the skin was unbroken.

William Hall, a stoker, of 2 Thetis-road, Cowes, said he was present when deceased asked the last witness to look at his arm, and he corroborated his evidence as to the conversation between the two men.

By the Inspector: There could be no rubbing of the elbow by the end of the stoking rod as it was used with their arms straight out in front of them. There was plenty of washing accommodation with hot water at the works, and a first-aid box in case of a person receiving an injury.

Mary Hamilton, house surgeon at the County Hospital, said she examined deceased on his admission on October 6th and found a large fusiform swelling extending from half-way up the forearm to about one and a half inches above the elbow. She found no sign of a wound or puncture of the skin, and could come to no conclusion as to the origin of the swelling. Deceased was suffering from cellulitis of the arm, and after consulting with Dr. Straton, the surgeon on duty, deceased was operated on an hour or two after he was admitted. The swelling did not improve after the operation. He was then suffering from general blood-poisoning.

The Coroner: Would you like to advance the opinion that the poisoning could have originated from his employment at the Gasworks? — No, I don't think it had anything to do with an injury.

The Coroner: Not even from inhalation of gas? - No.

Witness added that deceased died at 3.45 a.m. on Saturday.

The Coroner: Would the formation of boils and swellings be one of the usual symptoms in cases of blood poisoning ?, Yes. — And it might occur in any part of the body ? - Yes.- If it had been a case of gas poisoning I take it the symptoms would not have been the same? — No.

Mr Hughes: Is it possible it may have been caused through something entering into the skin through the pores—in the nature of pitch or tar? —There is no evidence of it in this case.

Replying to further questions by Mr. Hughes witness said she had come across similar cases to the present one. The swelling in the arm was due to the poison lodging there and from there through the body again. A general weakness in health would not have caused the swelling in the arm—there must be a primary cause. Such a condition would not be likely to arise more frequently in persons working in a high temperature or amongst people working indoors. There was really no determining factor in cases of that sort as no two cases arose alike.

Mr. Hughes: Could a person absorb into his skin pitch or tar or some carbonate that would have the effect of accelerating the poisoning? —He could not absorb anything through an unbroken skin.

Asked by Mr. Hughes for an example of how the poisoning might arise, Miss Hamilton said there were various forms, one of which might be through the tonsils.

Mr. Hughes: But would that be affected in any way by the air in a gasworks? — No.

By the Coroner: Deceased showed no symptoms of gas poisoning.

By Mr. Hughes: Deceased could have got into the condition she saw him within three days.

By the Inspector: It was very improbable that the inception could have occurred after a puncture of the skin had healed. She was not personally acquainted with industrial dermatitis, but there was no dermatitis in the present case as the skin was not affected.

Mr. Damant informed the coroner that the manager of the Gasworks was present if required, but he could add nothing to the evidence already given. It was decided to dispense with his evidence.

The Coroner, in summing up, said he wished first of all to commend the relatives of the deceased upon the straightforward way they had given their evidence. Everyone knew that in those cases where there was a possibility of employer's liability the relatives were apt to strain the facts, but in that case he had been very much impressed with the extreme uniformity of the evidence and attitude of the relatives. They had the fact that deceased had not complained of any injury whatever. If there had been an injury and the skin had been broken it was quite possible that the poisoning would have arisen through it. All the witnesses agreed that the unfortunate man did not complain of any injury, and Miss Hamilton, who gave her evidence very clearly, had stated there was nothing to suggest what the blood-poisoning arose from. She had said it did not arise from gas poisoning, the symptoms of which could never be mistaken by a doctor. There was really no evidence to determine where that blood-poisoning originated.

The jury returned a verdict that deceased died from blood-poisoning, and that there was not sufficient evidence to show the cause.

Mr. Damant, on behalf of the Cowes District Council, expressed sincere regret at the death of a most respected employee. Deceased had been employed by the Council for the last 17 years, and had given every satisfaction. On behalf of the Council he expressed deep sympathy with the widow and relatives.

Mr. Hughes acknowledged the expression on behalf of the relatives.

The jury handed their fees to the widow.

The interment took place on Wednesday at Carisbrooke Cemetery, following a service at the United Methodist Chapel, Gunville. The Rev. W.H. Mildon officiated. The hymns "Jesu, Lover of my soul " and " Rock of ages" were sung. The mourners were the widow, Messrs. Henry and William Earley (sons), Mr. C. Earley (father), Messrs. Frank, William, Fred, and Jack Earley (brothers), Messrs. C. Cant, C. Way, W. Freeman, T. Ash, R. Cant, and T. Glassey (brothers-in-law), Mrs. W. Earley (sister-in-law), Messrs. W Hambry and Frank and Jim Earley (nephews), and the manager, secretary, and fellow workmen from the Cowes Council Gasworks, and many others were present. There were 36 floral tributes from relatives and friends, these including the workmen and staff of the Cowes gas department, the Gunville United Methodist Chapel, and Brown's Bus Co.

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